

IJA RESEARCH REPORTS

Institute of Jewish Affairs in association with the World Jewish Congress

Summary

MARTIN KRAMER

ISRAEL IN THE MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

NOVEMBER 1986 Nos. 11 & 12

For nearly two decades, the Vatican and the World Council of Churches (WCC) have sought to establish a framework for formal religious dialogue with Muslim institutions. Potential Muslim partners have generally been reluctant to lend themselves to these initiatives, which have been criticized by Muslim fundamentalists as deceptive ruses to undermine Islam. But certain Muslim institutions have welcomed the dialogue as another means of political struggle, through which to elicit Christian condemnations of Israel, Israeli policies, and the idea of Jewish peoplehood. They have often turned dialogue encounters into political platforms, arguing that Islam admits no distinction between religion and politics. The liberation of a Muslim people from the rule of non-Muslims is presented as a matter of Islamic principle, which demands recognition in any religious dialogue. The Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians and the World Council of Churches' Sub-Unit on Dialogue have resisted these attempts with varying degrees of success.

The Secretariat for Non-Christians entered into a series of formal dialogues with Muslims during the 1970s. The Muslim partners were institutions and individuals variously identified with the governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Iran. The intrusion of politics in these encounters varied widely according to changing political circumstances. A Tripoli Seminar co-sponsored by the Vatican and Libya in 1976 was blatantly used by the Libyans to denounce Zionism as racism and the Holy See had to disavow a portion of the final joint declaration. In other encounters, the pressure was more subtle and the Muslim aims more modest, but the issues continued to arise. The Iranian revolution and the ascendance of Muslim extremism finally led the Secretariat for Non-Christians to suspend its search for institutional partners. The Secretariat now relies upon papal pronouncements and travels to evoke favourable comment in the Muslim world and patiently awaits some improvement in the climate of Muslim-Christian relations.

In the 1980s, the initiative for institutional dialogue passed to the WCC's Dialogue Sub-Unit. The WCC finally found a partner in a minor organization based in Karachi, Pakistan: the World Muslim Congress,

Copies of this *Research Report* can be obtained from:

THE INSTITUTE OF JEWISH AFFAIRS, 11 HERTFORD ST., LONDON W1Y 7DX

Tel: 01-491 3517 Cables IJA STUDIES LONDON W1 Telex: 21633

known as the Motamar. The Motamar, dependent in many ways upon Saudi Arabia, had made itself a principal channel for the dissemination of an anti-Zionism infused with explicit antisemitism. Its relationship with the WCC culminated in a co-sponsored dialogue held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in March 1982, which the Motamar's delegation used to air a variety of anti-Israel grievances. During the past four years, the WCC-Motamar relationship has made little further progress because of the Motamar's lack of interest and the antisemitic declarations of its presiding officer. But the WCC and the Motamar remain committed to establishing a 'Joint Standing Committee' for sustained dialogue, once a moderation of Muslim opinion allows it.

It is quite possible that direct dialogue will be resumed some time soon, perhaps on the foundation of WCC-Motamar co-operation. It is an open question whether future encounters will dwell upon the Motamar's familiar grievances against Israel, or will pass to the substantial agenda of Christian-Muslim relations. The Motamar may have no choice but to endorse the views of President Zia ul-Haq of Pakistan, who in March 1986 urged the PLO to recognize Israel. But other influences, many of them radicalizing, are also at work upon the Motamar. Still another possibility is a dialogue under the shared auspices of the Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians and the Muslim World League in Mecca. This organization, the principal instrument of Saudi religious influence abroad, has avoided direct dialogue in the past, but has recently come into contact with the Vatican. In any event, the resumption of Christian dialogue with the Motamar, the Muslim World League, or any other Muslim institution, will be felt in the high-level dialogue between Christians and Jews, and warrants the close attention of Jewish institutions.

DR MARTIN KRAMER is Senior Fellow at Tel Aviv University's Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies. He is the author of *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congresses* (Columbia University Press, 1986), and editor of *Shi'ism, Resistance and Revolution* (Westview Press and Mansell Publishing, forthcoming in 1987).

RESEARCH REPORT

Source must be quoted on publication

nk- Poles
Institute of Jewish Affairs
in association with the
World Jewish Congress

IJA

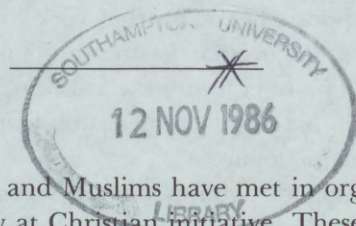
11 Hertford Street
London W1Y 7DX
Telephone 01-491 3517
Cables IJA STUDIES LONDON W1

November 1986

Nos. 11 & 12

Israel in the Muslim-Christian Dialogue

The State of Israel has frequently figured in the formal religious dialogue between Muslim and Christian institutions. Time and again, Muslims have treated such encounters as arenas for political manoeuvring, seeking to elicit Christian condemnations of Israel, Israeli policies, and the idea of Jewish peoplehood. The greatest Muslim pressure has been brought to bear upon the Vatican and the World Council of Churches, which have struggled to keep religious dialogues with Muslims unencumbered by politics. In this *Report*, Dr Martin Kramer, Senior Fellow at Tel Aviv University's Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, examines this dimension of organized dialogue between the foremost Christian and Muslim institutions. In charting the course of recent Muslim-Christian dialogue at the highest level, he sheds new light on the Churches' pursuit of tractable partners, and the political aims of major Muslim organizations. Dr Kramer suggests that formal and direct Muslim-Christian dialogue, virtually suspended since 1982, may soon be resumed, with potential effect upon the parallel dialogue between Christians and Jews.



For two decades, Christians and Muslims have met in organized religious dialogue encounters, usually at Christian initiative. These encounters owed their emergence partly to the difficult situation which faced Christian minorities and Christian religious institutions in the post-colonial period in the many new Muslim states of Asia and Africa. During the era of Western ascendancy, Western powers provided an umbrella for Christian minorities, schools, and missionary activities among Muslims. Partly in reaction to this,

there arose nationalisms resentful of the privileged position of non-Muslim minorities and opposed to the idea of Christian mission. With the retreat of the West, these nationalisms emerged triumphant in most Muslim countries.

Through dialogue, Christian individuals and institutions have worked to dissociate the faith of Christianity from colonialism. They have emphasized, and sometimes exaggerated, the points of theological convergence between Christianity and Islam, and have tried to remind Muslims of those elements of tolerance in Muslim tradition. Their pursuit has become still more urgent and more difficult during this present period of Islamic resurgence, which threatens to eliminate religious pluralism wherever it survives in Muslim societies.

The Muslim response to these Christian overtures has never been great. During colonialism's heyday, Muslims often suffered the humiliating denigration of their faith by believing Christians. Now that the tables are turned, there is a widespread sense in the Muslim world that Islam as a religious creed has been vindicated, that its truth has been affirmed by its triumph. Among radicals, there persists a strong sense that Islam remains on the defensive against a great assault by Western culture and power. Among these Muslims thrives the belief that now is the right moment to launch a last-ditch resistance which breaches no compromise. There are a few Muslims who do sincerely seek a dialogue and they are its steadiest partners. The growing Muslim minorities in the West also have an evident interest in religious dialogue, for they depend upon the elements of tolerance in a rival faith and culture. But together these interested Muslims constitute a small minority on the fringes of contemporary Islam.

Some Muslims, however, hold another view, regarding Muslim-Christian dialogue as a means of political struggle. They are convinced that the State of Israel is the last outpost of a dying colonialism, and that if the West can be made to disown its creation, the Jewish transplant in Palestine will wither. They have entered the dialogue with the purpose of winning Christian moral censure, not only of Israel's policies, but of Israel's existence, and of the larger Jewry which supports her. This they seek to do by declaring to their Christian partners in dialogue that Islam admits no distinction between religion and politics. The liberation of a Muslim people and land from the rule of non-Muslims is therefore a religious obligation, which demands respect in any religious dialogue.

In this manner, dialogue encounters have become arenas for polemical exchanges and delicate diplomacy between Muslims and Christians over Israel. The political stakes have been the highest whenever the Christian partner has had some international standing of influence and has simultaneously pursued a dialogue with Jews. Such is especially the case in those dialogues where the Christian perspective is represented either by the Vatican or the World Council of Churches. Muslim-Christian dialogue is also

underway at many lesser levels, but only at this highest level do Muslims bring their full pressure to bear upon Christian institutions burdened by a sense of historic responsibility for Jewish suffering and survival.

What follows is an examination of how the hidden agenda of Israel has intruded into the religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians at the highest level. The dialogue, of course, also has an explicit agenda, which includes points of doctrine and theology, the missionary drive of both faiths, and the rights and obligations of religious minorities. When Muslims and Christians meet in formal dialogue, they discuss much more than the Jewish state.¹ But no other issue has arisen so often to divert the successive episodes of the dialogue from their declared agendas. On that account, Jewry and Israel have an interest in the dialogue despite their formal exclusion, for Christian dialogue with Muslims cannot but affect simultaneous Christian dialogue with Jews.

The Vatican's Muslim partners

On 28 October 1965, the Second Vatican Council promulgated the 'Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions', also known by its Latin title, *Nostra Aetate*. This landmark document repudiated the charge of deicide against the Jewish people and laid the doctrinal foundations for subsequent dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jews (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 4). But the 'Declaration' also incorporated an overture to Islam (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 3), which was added to a draft document which had mainly treated of the Church's relationship to the Jews. That the text developed along these separate but parallel lines was due largely to concern among its drafters over possible repercussions in the Arab-Muslim world, where the repudiation of the deicide charge was all too likely to be misconstrued as political support for the State of Israel. These concerns were magnified by the Fathers of the Eastern Church, who administer to Catholics in predominantly Arab and Muslim countries. At first they sought to strike out the passage concerning responsibility for the death of Jesus, but when this proved impossible, they adopted another tack. *Nostra Aetate*, they argued, should include an explicit overture to Islam, comparable in scope and import to the repudiation of the deicide charge against the Jews.² The overture took the form of a separate paragraph in *Nostra Aetate*. 'Upon the Muslims, too, the Church looks with esteem', it begins, and ultimately makes this gesture: 'Although in the course of the centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and

1 For a general appraisal of the dialogue's early progress and problems from a Christian perspective, see Maurice Borrmans, 'The Muslim-Christian dialogue of the last ten years', *Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin* (Brussels), no. 74, September-October 1978, 1-52.

2 On the conciliar policy of the Fathers of the Eastern Church, see Youakim Moubarac, *Pentalogie islamo-chrétienne*, vol. 3, *L'Islam et le dialogue islamo-chrétien* (Beirut 1972-73), 147-74.

Muslims, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind, let them make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom'.

This significant overture had a firm foundation in the quest by many individual Catholics for a deeper understanding of Islam.³ A Catholic gesture toward Islam, had it been made and timed differently, might even have been reciprocated. As it happened, it came at a moment when few Muslims were prepared to respond favourably to an authoritative reinterpretation of the Church's doctrine toward Islam. Instead, most Muslims who did follow the deliberations of Vatican II were incensed at the prospect of any Catholic 'exculpation' of the Jews, which they believed would work to the advantage of Zionism and Israel. Indeed, many Muslims held that the repudiation of the deicide charge in *Nostra Aetate* was itself politically motivated, the result of growing Zionist influence over the Catholic Church. When the text of *Nostra Aetate* was approved in November 1964, the most widespread Muslim reaction was not to welcome its declaration on Islam, but to attack its declaration on the Jews.⁴

The fullest expression of this hostile Muslim view of *Nostra Aetate* appeared in a statement issued by the Constituent Council of the Muslim World League in Mecca. This organization, of which more later, announced that Vatican II's 'Declaration' 'has been preceded by public and clandestine attempts by Zionist circles and the imperialist forces that are subservient to them for a long time to get this decision, which negates the religious aspect and makes it a purely political move aimed at securing the Christian world's support for the Zionist concept and its devilish and wicked designs against Islam, the Arabs, and the whole human race'. Catholic beliefs had become 'a plaything in the hands of Jews'. By this 'wicked alliance', the Church had proven itself 'antagonistic toward Islam and the Arabs' and damaged its own interests in Muslim countries. The Muslim World League statement made no mention at all of the declaration on Islam in *Nostra Aetate*, simply because there existed no reciprocal interest in dialogue among its members.⁵

For nearly a decade after the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, the Church initiated no formal dialogue with any Muslim institution. In May 1964, it had established a Secretariat for Non-Christians, incorporating an Office (and later a Commission) for Islam. As a new institution, the Secretariat was perhaps slow and even hesitant to act, especially as its role was none too

3 On which see Youakim Moubarac, *Recherches sur la pensée chrétienne et l'Islam dans les temps modernes et à l'époque contemporaine* (Beirut 1977), 398-428.

4 For a sampling of this reaction, see Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes to Israel* (Jerusalem 1972), 288-92.

5 Statement of the Constituent Council of the Muslim World League, *Majallat Rabitat al-'Alam al-Islami* (Mecca), vol. 2, no. 7, January-February 1965, 14-16; *al-Bilad* (Jidda), 29 November 1964; *Oriente Moderno* (Rome), vol. 44, 1964, 703.

clear.⁶ But the greatest difficulty lay in identifying Muslim institutional partners which were amenable to dialogue, exercised wide authority in Islam and had no political motive in exchanging ideas on matters of faith. Most Muslim institutions were not prepared at all to enter into an official dialogue. Of those that were, none exercised an authority in any way comparable to that of the Holy See, although some enjoyed more standing than others. Of these institutions, nearly all were subservient to their governments and led by persons who regarded politics and religion as inseparable. Rivalries between their state sponsors made it unthinkable for them to form a coalition, even for the limited purpose of dialogue with the Church. And because they were wholly preoccupied with formulating Muslim theological opposition to Zionism and the State of Israel, they were liable to lead any religious dialogue straight into the thick of the Middle East conflict. The making and explaining of Vatican policy toward this conflict was the sole province of the Vatican's Secretariat of State. The Secretariat for Non-Christians held a brief limited strictly to religious dialogue and so had to proceed with extreme caution.

The Secretariat did respond to one outside initiative, by an Egyptian Arab League official in Rome, who arranged a visit by a delegation from his country's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in December 1970. The Egyptian initiative and visit were almost certainly prompted by the simultaneous opening of a formal Church dialogue with a specially formed organized International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations. But since there was no equally broad Muslim interest in dialogue, the Secretariat for Non-Christians had to accept a partner with much more limited credentials. As a government-appointed body, Egypt's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs served only purposes of state at home, and had no authority and uncertain influence beyond Egypt. Its highly politicized activities had been devoted mostly to the elaboration of the regime's 'Islamic socialism' and the Muslim case against Israel.⁷ The Secretariat for Non-Christians therefore insisted in advance that the Egyptians not politicize an official visit, and the joint communiqué issued after the visit spoke only of mutual support for the 're-establishment of peace in the Middle East with justice and honour'.⁸

The needs of equity were thus served. The head of the Secretariat's Office of Islam proclaimed that the encounter was a 'total rebuttal to those who

6 For its early history, see M. L. Fitzgerald, 'The Secretariat for Non-Christians is ten years old', *Islamochristiana* (Rome), vol. 1, 1975, 87-90.

7 On the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, see Daniel Crecelius, 'Die Religion im Dienste des islamischen Staatsozialismus in Ägypten', *Bustan* (Vienna), vol. 3, 1967, 13-20. The Cairo-based Council, a rival to the Mecca-based Muslim World League, did recognize the opening to Islam in *Nostra Aetate*; see its monthly *Minbar al-Islam* (Cairo), April 1965.

8 Account of the visit in *Secretariatus pro non-Christianis Bulletin* (hereafter *Bulletin*) (Vatican), no. 16, 1971, 41-4.

maintain that, in the present circumstances, all dialogue with Muslims turns to politics'.⁹ But the 1970 meeting had been preceded by painstaking preparations, precisely to assure that politics were excluded from discussions. Such meetings necessitated constant vigilance on the part of the Church. Paolo Cardinal Marella, President of the Secretariat for Non-Christians from 1964 to 1973, scrupulously maintained that vigilance by showing no initiative. The Secretariat under his leadership seemed to understand that a crisis of self-esteem had descended upon the Arab and Muslim worlds after the June 1967 war and that the Church should steer clear of involvement.¹⁰

But new circumstances led the Secretariat for Non-Christians to take its own far-reaching initiative in establishing formal ties with Muslim institutions. First, there had developed a 'holy rivalry' between dialogue with Muslims and the Church's 'dialogue with Jews, conducted through another Secretariat and Commission.¹¹ This fed upon the same dialectical process which had produced the text of *Nostra Aetate*, the shared charter of both dialogues. The dialogue with Muslims could not be permitted to march in place while dialogue with the Jews proceeded apace, since any imbalance might erode the Church's position in Muslim lands and the confidence of Arab Catholics. Yet the Church had found willing Jewish partners, who had formed a coalition of Jewish institutions for the purpose of dialogue. Some parallel progress had to be shown with Islam. Second, Cardinal Marella was succeeded in March 1973 by Sergio Cardinal Pignedoli, who possessed a more activist disposition. Third, the October 1973 war created a new climate of self-confidence in the Arab-Muslim world and the oil revolution seemed to endow it with vast economic and political importance, especially for Europe.

Cardinal Pignedoli's initiative

The solution was to seek out partners in dialogue on Muslim ground, in order to put together what the Muslims themselves had not formed: a broad committee of liaison, comparable to that established by Jewish institutions. The Secretariat first fixed its gaze upon that Muslim ruler whose new wealth enhanced his own claim to speak for all Islam: King Faysal of Saudi Arabia. During the previous decade, the Saudi king had conducted a vigorous pan-Islamic policy which rested upon Saudi religious pretensions and Saudi rule over Islam's holiest cities, Mecca and Medina. Cardinal Pignedoli arrived in the Saudi capital in April 1974, bearing a letter from Pope Paul VI and a request that King Faysal approve the visit of a Saudi religious delegation to the Vatican.

King Faysal had no interest in promoting a religious dialogue, which would

⁹ *Proche-Orient chrétien* (Jerusalem), vol. 21, 1971, 61.

¹⁰ On this period, see Pietro Rossano, 'The Secretariat for Non-Christians', *Bulletin*, nos. 41-2, 1979, 90-6.

¹¹ The phrase 'holy rivalry' is that of Borrmans, 21.

certainly have been opposed by the highly conservative Saudi clergy. But he approved the visit, taking the trouble to remind his supplicants that he and all Muslims shared with the Holy See a deep concern for Jerusalem. During Cardinal Pignedoli's audience with King Faysal, the Saudi monarch hammered away at the Jerusalem issue. The Jews had no holy places in Jerusalem; the only believers with incontestable rights to holy places in the city were Muslims and Christians. At one point, King Faysal raised his voice to declare that under Islam, 'Jews had never been allowed in Palestine and particularly in Jerusalem'. By presenting this supposed exclusion as a matter of Islamic principle, the Saudi ruler sought its recognition as an issue deserving of discussion in any dialogue between Muslims and Christians. The Jerusalem question thus rose to the very top of the implicit agenda of the dialogue. If the Vatican's view of the Jerusalem issue could be made to approximate Islam's view, as represented by King Faysal, the moral pressure brought to bear on Israel might be much augmented. It also suited King Faysal, as one who claimed so insistently to speak for the entire Muslim world, to deal on its behalf with his ostensible equal, Pope Paul VI. Saudi press reports had it that the Pope's letter expressed the Holy See's esteem for King Faysal as the 'supreme authority of the Islamic world', and Cardinal Pignedoli found in King Faysal 'not only the head of a great and noble nation but also—something of great importance to us—a great believer in God, who accords the highest priority to spiritual and moral values'. King Faysal could only welcome such testaments to his religious authority and personal piety.¹²

In September 1974, Cardinal Pignedoli made another journey, this time to Egypt, in order to broaden the base of his initiative. Formally, the role of host was played by Egypt's Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, but the Secretariat's hope was to establish contact with the head of the great Muslim seat of learning, al-Azhar. The delegation was received cordially by the Rector of al-Azhar, Shaykh 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud, but he did not offer to take over the dialogue from the hands of the expressly political Supreme Council. Instead, he loaded his guests with books on Palestine and the historic role of al-Azhar in resisting foreign aggression. Egypt's President Sadat received the delegation in his native village and, to his guests' relief, did not speak of Palestine or politics. The delegation's official hosts were not so considerate, and the final communiqué, issued by the Secretariat and the Supreme Council, could not but mention the peace of Jerusalem.¹³ Yet this sort of banal reference concealed a fundamental difference. It was true that the Vatican's position on Jerusalem did not accept the unilateral Israeli

¹² For Cardinal Pignedoli's visit to Saudi Arabia and Saudi press reaction, see *Proche-Orient chrétien*, vol. 24, 1974, 203-4.

¹³ Accounts of the visit in *Bulletin*, nos. 28-9, 1975, 175-80; *Proche-Orient chrétien*, vol. 24, 1974, 400-2; and unpublished Vatican report on the mission.

'unification' of the city. But it also did not advocate the restoration of Jerusalem to Arab-Muslim sovereignty. The solution favoured by the Vatican was the transformation of the city into a *corpus separatum* and is today, at the very least, the establishment of a special regime for the holy places.¹⁴ When the Egyptians saw that religious dialogue with the Secretariat for Non-Christians would produce no movement on this issue, they made no promise to institutionalize or broaden the exchange.

All finally hinged upon the Saudi delegation which arrived in Rome in October 1974. It was led by Saudi Minister of Justice Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali al-Harakan, an arch-conservative who, in 1976, would become secretary-general of that same Muslim World League in Mecca which had denounced *Nostra Aetate* as a Jewish plot. The visit was cordial, but the Saudis made no offer to broaden or even continue the dialogue.¹⁵

Cardinal Pignedoli's ambitious initiative of 1974 had therefore run aground. Although he had travelled to Saudi Arabia and Egypt, met King Faysal and President Sadat, and treated with leading Muslim clerics, he had failed to bring them together to form a standing committee of liaison. Without periodic encounters between the Secretariat and a wide coalition of Muslim institutions, the dialogue could not progress. The leading Muslim institutions, for their part, were obviously not much interested in systematic religious dialogue. Their major purpose in dealing with Cardinal Pignedoli had been to lead the Secretariat for Non-Christians to lobby in the Vatican for changes in the Holy See's Middle East policy. But when they saw how scrupulously Cardinal Pignedoli avoided politics, adhering strictly to the Vatican's declared policy on Jerusalem, they saw no reason to institutionalize an exchange. This impasse led Cardinal Pignedoli to take an ill-conceived decision which ultimately would embarrass both his Secretariat and the Holy See. He agreed to an overture for dialogue made by Libya.

The Tripoli Seminar on Islamic-Christian Dialogue

In July 1975, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Libya's Arab Socialist Union, Ahmad al-Shahhati, offered Cardinal Pignedoli something which had completely eluded him in his dealings with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Not only was Libya prepared to enter into official religious dialogue, but it was ready to put together a Muslim delegation with international credentials. What had Libya to gain from such a dialogue? Libya was of considerable weight in the world oil market, but of inverse importance to the historical evolution of

14 Marcel Boisard, 'Le Saint-Siège et la Palestine', *Relations internationales* (Geneva), no. 28, 1981, 442-55; Pietro Pastorelli, 'La Santa Sede e il problema di Gerusalemme', *Storia e Politica* (Milan), vol. 21, 1982, 57-98; Silvio Ferrari, 'The Vatican, Israel and the Jerusalem question (1943-1984)', *Middle East Journal* (Washington), vol. 39, 1985, 316-31; also Pope John Paul II's 1984 Good Friday apostolic letter *Redemptionis Anno* in *L'Osservatore Romano* 30 April 1984.

15 On the visit of the Saudi delegation, see *Bulletin*, nos. 28-9, 1975, 181-5; *Proche-Orient chrétien*, vol. 24, 1974, 402-4.

Islam. Yet Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi held himself to be a final authority on Islam, enforcing his highly personal brand of the faith as state doctrine. Qadhafi had concocted a highly eclectic dogma of Islam as the embodiment of true socialism, an idea elaborated in his 'Green Book' and exported by sundry means to the wider Muslim world.¹⁶ As a self-appointed interpreter of Islam, he had incurred the wrath of those very religious authorities in Saudi Arabia and Egypt who had so exasperated Cardinal Pignedoli. Qadhafi thus stood only to gain by playing the head of Islam and champion of the Palestinian cause in a dialogue with the Church. Yet the Secretariat for Non-Christians convinced itself that the dialogue could be restricted to religion, and that meticulous advance planning could prevent Libyan manipulation of the event for purely political purposes.

The Seminar on Islamic-Christian Dialogue met in the Libyan capital of Tripoli in February 1976.¹⁷ Even before it opened, preparatory steps taken by the Libyans gave rise to much concern in the Secretariat for Non-Christians. The Libyans unilaterally issued hundreds of invitations and failed to honour a commitment to name their official delegates and provide texts of their speeches well in advance. When Cardinal Pignedoli and his official delegation arrived in Tripoli, they were astonished to find some 500 guests in attendance, from over sixty countries. One member of the delegation remarked that 'we found ourselves face to face for the first time with universal Islam, from Mauritania to Malaysia, from Argentina to the Soviet Union'.¹⁸ However, no participants arrived from Saudi Arabia and the Rector of al-Azhar in Cairo delegated no one to speak on his behalf. And while the gathering enjoyed the official co-sponsorship of the Holy See and Libya, members of the Libyan delegation, who came from several Muslim countries, spoke strictly in their personal capacities. The two delegations were hardly of equal competence.

Still more striking was the political character of the Libyan delegation, in contrast to the strictly religious character of the delegation under Cardinal Pignedoli. In press conferences and interviews, both Vatican officials and the Libyan organizers had asserted that the dialogue would be confined to religion and theology. But this distinction between religion and politics was not one which Qadhafi himself admitted, nor did most of the other Muslim speakers. Qadhafi, as well as many Muslim delegates, repeatedly and

16 On Qadhafi's views and pretensions, see Lisa Anderson, 'Qaddafi's Islam', in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York 1983), 134-49.

17 The fullest account, with bibliography, is by Maurice Borrmans, 'Le séminaire du dialogue islamo-chrétien de Tripoli (Libye)', *Islamochristiana*, vol. 2, 1976, 135-70 (with Arabic text of final declaration). Also very useful are the official 'Report', *Bulletin*, no. 31, 1976, 5-21; Joseph Vandrisse, 'Le séminaire islamo-chrétien de Tripoli', *Proche-Orient chrétien*, vol. 26, 1976, 59-65; and Jean-Paul Charnay, 'Le dialogue islamo-chrétien: essai d'interprétation psycho-stratégique', *Politique étrangère* (Paris), vol. 41, 1976, 219-39.

18 'Report', *Bulletin*, no. 31, 10.

vehemently condemned Israel, Zionism and the Jews in their speeches. The Vatican's delegates were so preoccupied with fending off Muslim criticisms and misinterpretations of Christian faith that they hardly had the fortitude to protest these diversions.

This lapse in vigilance ultimately produced a blunder which overshadowed whatever understanding had been reached during the dialogue. The Vatican's delegates, victims of a probable combination of Libyan ruse and their own inattentiveness, allowed the reading of a final joint declaration which denounced Zionism as 'an aggressive racist movement, extraneous to Palestine and the whole region of the East'. In obvious contradiction to Vatican policy, the declaration affirmed 'the Arab character of Jerusalem' and rejected 'plans to Judaize or internationalize' the city. Both 'parties' affirmed 'the national rights of the Palestinian people and their right to return to their lands' and demanded 'the liberation of all the occupied territories'. Cardinal Pignedoli had not even seen the offending resolutions before they were announced, and desperately sought to append his reservations as soon as the Seminar had closed. But this failure to show vigilance now forced the Holy See to formally disavow the two paragraphs in question, as 'their content does not correspond, in its essential points, to the well-known position of the Holy See'. A barrage of criticism descended upon Cardinal Pignedoli.

The Secretariat for Non-Christians immediately sought to minimize the impact of this final 'incident' and to ascribe the offending resolutions to undue haste and confusion in preparing the final declaration. Why did the Vatican not lay the blame squarely where it belonged? Libya had taken an important step by agreeing, in the words of another resolution, to 'set up a permanent mixed Commission' with the Vatican, which 'will also have the task of preparing other Seminars and Meetings'. The Vatican did not wish to lose this gain, even if the Seminar had obviously been used politically. After the Tripoli Seminar's closure, the Vatican established diplomatic relations with Libya and Pope Paul VI received Libyan Seminar organizer Ahmad al-Shahhati in March 1976.

But the Tripoli episode had made it clear that Qadhafi was far from an ideal partner, in light of what the Church saw as his utter inability to fathom the distinction between the temporal and the spiritual. As Cardinal Pignedoli concluded, 'one of the greatest hindrances to dialogue is political intervention in religion. Some people do not make the Gospel's distinction between what is Caesar's and what is God's, and people's minds are, moreover, troubled by local tensions or fear of losing their freedom'.¹⁹ Most of the Muslim delegates at Tripoli, and certainly Qadhafi, could be counted among those people. The Libyans remained eager to follow up the Tripoli Seminar, since it had

19 *Bulletin*, no. 36, 1977, 95.

cast Qadhafi as spokesman for all Islam. But the Secretariat for Non-Christians, or perhaps a still higher authority, decided that the Holy See should look elsewhere. The third anniversary of the Seminar was marked rather modestly at Unesco headquarters in Paris in March 1979. Cardinal Pignedoli did not attend, delegating his secretary in his stead.²⁰ This was hardly the sequel of full co-operation anticipated by the Tripoli resolutions.²¹

Initiatives in Iran and Egypt

After the Tripoli fiasco, it seems to have dawned upon officials in the Secretariat for Non-Christians that it might be best to invest their efforts in a part of the Muslim world where the Middle East conflict stirred fewer passions. Perhaps there they might find Muslims willing to conduct a purely religious dialogue, free of political manipulations and without constant reference to Israel, Zionism and the Jews. This approach meant circumventing the Arabs, who were immersed in the conflict, but constituted only about one-seventh of the world's Muslims. The shift in emphasis did not come readily to the Secretariat for Non-Christians. The Secretariat's experts on Islam were nearly all Arabists, and the Vatican's research and teaching centre on Islam was then known as the Pontifical Institute for Arabic Studies. In the Secretariat's first 'Guidelines' for dialogue, which appeared in 1969, the Arabs were held to occupy 'a privileged position' in Islam. The faith of Islam was born among the Arabs, 'and reached among them and through their efforts its most perfect expression. The Arab form of Islam has become more or less the standard form of belief and practice for the whole Islamic World'. Of course it was true that 'here and there' in the non-Arab Muslim world, 'the Arabs are attacked on the political level, but this does not minimize the authority of their religious chiefs and their great thinkers, except in isolated and marginal cases'.²² These fixed ideas about Arab primacy in Islam had compelled the Secretariat to approach what it regarded as Islam's purest Arab source, in such places as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Libya. But having found this pure source polluted by political strife, might it not be best to head downstream, away from the Arabs, and there find suitable Muslim partners?

And so Cardinal Pignedoli turned his thoughts to the Shah's Iran. As the Persian-speaking bastion of Shi'ite Islam, Iran did not promise that great opening to the broader Muslim world which had eluded the Secretariat for Non-Christians. But Iran did not seem to feel the heat generated by Arab

²⁰ *Bulletin*, no. 40, 1979, 15-19.

²¹ After the accession of Pope John Paul II, Libya renewed its appeal for co-operation, citing the supposed similarity between the views expressed by Qadhafi in his 'Green Book' and the views of the new Pope. See 'Prospects for Muslim-Christian action', *Jamahiriyah Review* (Tripoli), August 1980.

²² Secretariat for Non-Christians, *Guidelines for a Dialogue between Muslims and Christians* (Rome 1971), 58, 62-3.

opposition to Israel, and even enjoyed a co-operative relationship with the Jewish state. Cardinal Pignedoli arrived in Iran in June 1976, as a guest of the government-run Office of Religious Endowments.²³ There he heard a most encouraging assurance from Premier Amir Abbas Hoveida, who explained that in Iran, freedom of religion was guaranteed on the condition that religion not be used as a political instrument. Politics were 'reserved for the government'. During a visit to Qom, the centre of Shi'ite learning south of Tehran, Cardinal Pignedoli had an audience with Ayatollah Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari, 'chief of the Shi'a in Iran and in the entire world, so we are told'. The great mullah's standing was not quite so exalted, but he entertained the Cardinal in the presence of his own students and disciples, listening 'with a calm and smiling visage' to his guest's proposal for a formal dialogue with the Shi'ite world, in Rome or Iran. Ayatollah Shariatmadari gave no commitment, asking the Cardinal to write to him with details.

In the end, the Qom cleric produced no religious delegation. The Cardinal had completely misread Ayatollah Shariatmadari's request for details, which was not a genuine expression of interest, but a polite rebuff. Instead, the Iranian government sent a delegation of theology professors to Rome, led by Seyyed Hossein Nasr.²⁴ Professor Nasr had been schooled not at Qom but at MIT and Harvard, and had close ties to the Pahlavi establishment. He had won a reputation in European philosophical circles for his mystical interpretation of Shi'ite Islam, which he held to be apolitical in its very essence. Cardinal Pignedoli and Professor Nasr agreed in their December 1977 meeting that the Vatican and Iran should jointly sponsor a meeting of Muslim and Christian authorities and that there should even be a 'Jewish presence' at the gathering. The long-awaited breakthrough seemed imminent. The Vatican would engage in dialogue with a spiritual and apolitical Islam and the forum would even be opened by mutual agreement to the hitherto untouchable Jews. The Rector of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic Studies made precisely this point to an official Indonesian delegation which visited Cardinal Pignedoli that same month: 'The need is felt as well to open the conversations to Jews also, transforming dialogue into triologue'.²⁵

But Cardinal Pignedoli's timing could not have been less auspicious. Within months of this conversation, Qom had become a seat of revolutionary insurgency, inspired by a Shi'ite cleric in Iraqi exile who preached the absolute indivisibility of religion and politics. Imam Khomeini's revolution ultimately spelled disaster for all of Cardinal Pignedoli's Iranian interlocutors. Premier Hoveida was executed by order of a revolutionary tribunal. Ayatollah Shariatmadari was stripped of his binding authority as an interpreter of

23 Report on the visit in *Bulletin*, no. 33, 1976, 319-26.

24 Report of the visit in *Bulletin*, no. 37, 1978, 25-8.

25 *Bulletin*, no. 37, 1978, 11.

religious law and was imprisoned in his home. Professor Nasr fled into exile.

One last window of opportunity in the Arab world opened in Egypt, following President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem. Sadat subsequently visited Pope Paul VI in Rome, where he received the Holy See's endorsement of his peace initiative, and asked that an encounter be held between a Vatican delegation and the learned scholars of al-Azhar. What made this encounter possible? The Egyptian regime had brought tremendous pressure to bear on the reluctant Rector and scholars of al-Azhar to justify the peace initiative through the principles of Islam. State intervention made possible a religious dialogue free of reference to the region's great conflict and Cardinal Pignedoli seized the opportunity to lead a delegation to Cairo in April 1978, for a two-day encounter with a delegation led by the Rector of al-Azhar, Shaykh 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud.²⁶

Many difficulties arose during those two days, but their source lay in theology and rival missionary approaches of both faiths. Here, then, was another promise of sustained religious dialogue with a leading Muslim cultural institution. The Rector of al-Azhar accepted an invitation to return the visit and to maintain permanent contacts. As it happened, he died late that year. Though the initiative might have withered anyway, a new, daunting obstacle to continued formal dialogue now arose. A movement of fundamentalist opposition to Sadat's peace policy made inroads even within the halls of al-Azhar. This combined with a general Islamic awakening in Egypt, creating an intimidating climate of religious intolerance, which ultimately produced sectarian rioting between Egypt's Muslims and Christians in June 1981. The Azhar scholars backed off from further open encounters with the Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians, fearful lest they be subjected to withering fundamentalist criticism.²⁷

The emergence of Muslim extremism thus foiled Cardinal Pignedoli's last two initiatives, in Iran and Egypt. The list of his disappointments had now grown long. He had been thwarted at every turn, first by the Muslim proclivity to politicize every contact with his Secretariat, then by the wave of religious extremism sweeping through Muslim lands. Cardinal Pignedoli died in March 1980. His successor, Archbishop Jean Jadot, inherited a Secretariat which had yet to find a responsible Muslim partner for sustained dialogue, and which might justifiably have concluded that no such partner existed. Had Mgr Jadot been cut of his predecessor's cloth, he might have gone to yet another Muslim capital to prove otherwise. Instead, he made for Geneva, where the World Council of Churches stood on the verge of a breakthrough.

26 Accounts of encounter and texts in *Islamochristiana*, vol. 4, 1978, 214-17; *Bulletin*, no. 38, 1978, 157-60.

27 For the climate in Egypt at this time, see Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (Berkeley 1986), especially 166-9 on communal polemics and violence.

The World Council of Churches in pursuit of Islam

For a decade, the World Council of Churches (WCC) had conducted a parallel dialogue with Muslims, which differed markedly from that pursued by the Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians. The difference derived in large measure from the vastly different nature of the WCC's authority. The WCC is an international and interdenominational organization of over three hundred Protestant and Orthodox Churches, established in 1948. It holds no power over member Churches, but provides a co-operative framework for deliberation and action on matters of shared concern. The WCC lacks the international legal standing of the sovereign Holy See and the Holy See's absolute authority to define and interpret doctrine for believers. Its influence rests upon the moral authority of consensus.

In 1971, the WCC established a Sub-Unit for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies to answer the demand for structured dialogue with peoples of other faiths which had accompanied the rise of the ecumenical movement. The formal Jewish dialogue partner for the WCC has been the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, that same coalition of institutions which deals with the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. Like the Secretariat for Non-Christians, the Dialogue Sub-Unit soon realized that Muslim institutions would not form a similar coalition for the purposes of continuous dialogue. But because of the WCC's essentially voluntary constitution, the Dialogue Sub-Unit felt no need to match itself with those official (and usually state-controlled) Muslim institutions which were the preferred partners of the Secretariat for Non-Christians. Instead, the WCC unilaterally sponsored (and financed) many gatherings, inviting Christians and Muslims to meet as private individuals. Preliminary meetings of this sort were convened by the WCC even before the establishment of the Dialogue Sub-Unit, both in Switzerland and Lebanon.²⁸

The making of WCC policy on the Middle East conflict was beyond the competence of the Dialogue Sub-Unit. Still, occasional attempts were made to embroil dialogue encounters in its intricacies. Behind these efforts stood both Muslim participants and members of Middle Eastern churches, who sought to establish the religious necessity of political justice for the Palestinian people. The WCC managed to fight off these moves, usually by making it clear that informal encounters between non-representative participants could in no way bind the WCC. This method was employed successfully at the most inclusive WCC-sponsored encounter, convened in July 1972 in Broumana, Lebanon.²⁹ The gathering brought together a roughly equal number of

28 For the first encounters, see World Council of Churches, *Christians Meeting Muslims: WCC Papers on Ten Years of Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Geneva 1977); for the underpinnings of the initiative toward Islam in the thought of Protestant theologians, see Jean-Paul Gabus, 'Approches protestantes de l'Islam', in his *Islam et christianisme en dialogue* (Paris 1982), 9-74.

29 See S. J. Samartha and J. B. Taylor, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Papers from Broumana, 1972* (Geneva 1973).

Muslims and Christians, some of substantial reputation, from twenty countries. The final 'Memorandum' which it issued bound none of the participants and was not submitted to a vote. The sole reference to the conflict was a mild one: 'We also took notice of our peculiar joint involvement in the traditional status of Jerusalem, the destiny of its people, and the historic significance of its religious and social character. On these spiritual and international problems, we aspired to the unity which that city should symbolize for all believers in God'. Several of the participants had demanded a more far-reaching statement on justice for the Palestinian people, but failed to carry the day.

In fact, the unofficial nature of the Broumana encounter, and all other WCC-sponsored gatherings, made political manipulation somewhat pointless. As a WCC official told Muslim listeners on one occasion, 'the World Council of Churches cannot issue statements with the authority of the Vatican. Let me remind you all that the WCC is a consultative body, not a declaration-issuing body nor a legislative organization'. All it could do was 'stir up a lot of discussion'.³⁰ While this did not deter the determined, none of the WCC-sponsored encounters faced the degree of political pressure regularly brought to bear upon the Secretariat for Non-Christians.

But the officials in the Dialogue Sub-Unit could not long remain satisfied with the policy of 'individual non-representative invitations' to Muslims, however successful this policy had been in avoiding political complications. Bilateral invitations seemed more consistent with dialogue than unilateral WCC sponsorship of Muslim-Christian encounters and would clear the WCC of the charge that it spoke only with those Muslims whom it chose. Informal gatherings of individual Muslims and Christians were, furthermore, being convened by many other groups, most notably by the Asociación de Amistad Islamo-Cristiana de Espana, and the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Economiques et Sociales of the University of Tunis. If the WCC's Dialogue Sub-Unit were to make a truly original contribution, might it not be best to seek out a Muslim institution with an influence comparable to its own, as a truly equal partner?

The World Muslim Congress—the Motamar

In 1975, the WCC began to show an interest in the World Muslim Congress (known as the Motamar), headquartered in Karachi, Pakistan. Over the next few years, Dialogue Sub-Unit officials became convinced that the Motamar was 'a decentralized and locally based worldwide organization drawing support from "laity" and "clergy", from men and women in the local communities'.³¹ In other words, the Motamar was not an agency of any

³⁰ *International Review of Mission* (Geneva), vol. 65, 1976, 454.

³¹ John B. Taylor, 'Christian-Muslim dialogue', *Islamochristiana*, vol. 8, 1982, 204.

government, but a voluntary, independent and international association. As such, it could be imagined to approximate the WCC in its constitution and so might be a worthy candidate for co-sponsorship of a major Muslim-Christian encounter. In October 1976 and again in March 1979, representatives of the Motamar met with WCC officials in Switzerland, in 'planning meetings' aimed at producing a jointly-sponsored encounter.³² In December 1980, the Motamar finally agreed with the WCC to share sponsorship of a meeting on the theme of 'Christians and Muslims Living and Working Together' and even suggested that it might be possible to convene the encounter in Pakistan. The Motamar also undertook to choose the Muslim participants and to provide liaison with other Muslim organizations. These were the exciting developments which brought Mgr Jadot from Rome to Geneva in January 1981, where he concluded a co-operative agreement with the WCC's Dialogue Sub-Unit. Thereafter, the Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians had an official observer at every stage of the process.

In February 1981, the Secretary-General of the Motamar, Dr Inamullah Khan, paid his first official visit to WCC headquarters in Geneva. There he finalized plans for the joint consultation, which was scheduled for October 1981.³³ Later that February, Pope John Paul II sought to contribute to the climate of dialogue in Pakistan when he stopped over in Karachi on his way to Manila and spoke of the need for understanding between Christians and Muslims.³⁴ And in March 1981, Motamar President Dr Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi had an audience with the Pope, during which they spoke about advancing the dialogue. WCC staff visited Motamar headquarters in Karachi later in the year to confirm consultation arrangements. On one such occasion, the Motamar asked that the event be rescheduled for March 1982 and set in Colombo, Sri Lanka, where the Motamar expected to assemble an influential group of Muslims for another conference. The WCC co-sponsors acceded. This detailed and prolonged planning was intended to lay the foundations for a blunder-free meeting, which would give structure to all subsequent dialogue between Christian and Muslim institutions. Hopes ran high that the dialogue would produce an achievement which had repeatedly eluded the Secretariat for Non-Christians: the creation of a standing Muslim committee, willing to schedule periodic encounters and bring in other Muslim institutions. If all went well at Colombo, the Secretariat for Non-Christians would join the WCC as a full partner, in a truly authoritative Muslim-Christian committee for continuing dialogue.

It is necessary to pause here and consider the standing and reputation of

32 On the 1976 meeting, see World Council of Churches, *Christians Meeting Muslims*, 143-55; on the 1979 meeting, see *Islamochristiana*, vol. 5, 1979, 292-6.

33 Account of visit in *Ecumenical Review* (Geneva), vol. 33, 1981, 196.

34 On the impact of this visit, see M. Geijbels, 'Pope John Paul's visit to Karachi and Muslim-Christian relations', *al-Mushir* (Rawalpindi), vol. 23, 1981, 10-20.

the Motamar, which was suddenly burdened with so many Christian aspirations. The Motamar was not Islam's strongest reed. It briefly enjoyed an independent existence following its establishment in 1949, when it served as a general forum for Muslim anti-colonialism,³⁵ but after a few conferences began to lose momentum. It still organized the occasional gathering on behalf of this or that Muslim government, but led a shoestring existence in Karachi, while newer organizations flourished. In 1964, the Motamar became a subsidiary of one such organization: the Muslim World League, mentioned earlier in connection with its criticism of *Nostra Aetate*. Established in 1962 in Mecca, this international body was created by the Saudi regime, is headed by a Saudi national, and is totally dependent upon Saudi funding. As the largest Muslim missionary enterprise, the Muslim World League today employs nearly one thousand imams and missionaries in mosques and Islamic centres throughout the world, and maintains offices in New York, London, Paris and other cities.³⁶ The 1964 agreement with the Muslim World League infused the almost moribund Motamar with funds, but left it clearly dependent on Saudi largess, and obliged it to obtain Saudi approval for its every move.³⁷ The Motamar's president since 1974, Dr Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi, is a Syrian émigré living in Riyadh, where he has been a royal counsellor to a succession of Saudi monarchs.

The Motamar, then, had some local branches outside Pakistan, but it was hardly supported by 'local communities' 'worldwide', as the WCC claimed. It essentially operated as a Saudi subsidiary, often entrusted by the Muslim World League in Mecca with various unpleasant or potentially embarrassing tasks best left to a subordinate. One such task was dialogue with the WCC. The Muslim World League turned down a WCC invitation to add its own sponsorship to the planned encounter, announcing that Christian missionary activities among Muslims made dialogue impossible for the time being.³⁸ But the Muslim World League did authorize the Motamar in Karachi to deal openly with the WCC, probably in order to exact whatever worthwhile concessions could be attained through such a dialogue. The WCC, desperate for a Muslim co-sponsor, accepted the Muslim World League's snub stoically and agreed to enter into an equal partnership with the Motamar, a Muslim organization of the second order.

This mismatch also carried the possibility of serious political complications, to which the WCC must have been alive. Until 1974, the Motamar operated under the presidency of Hajj Amin al-Husayni, former mufti of Jerusalem,

35 There is no comprehensive study of the Motamar. On its establishment in context, see François-Marie Prause, 'Le panislamisme au Pakistan', *L'Afrique et l'Asie* (Paris), no. 22, 1953, 33-44.

36 On the Muslim World League, see Martin Kramer, 'The Muslim consensus undone', *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, 1981-82 (New York 1984), vol. 6, 295-7; also article in *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, 1984-85, forthcoming.

37 Terms of the agreement in *al-Bilad*, 20 April 1964; *Oriente Moderno*, vol. 44, 1964, 702.

38 Taylor, 'Christian-Muslim dialogue', 203.

nationalist leader and wartime collaborator in the service of Nazi Germany. Hajj Amin's Berlin infamies did not discredit him in Karachi, where he was acclaimed the Motamar's president in October 1950. During his twenty-three years at the helm of the Motamar, Hajj Amin thoroughly inculcated its officers and members with a seamless ideology of anti-Zionism and antisemitism. So long as Hajj Amin presided in this manner over the Motamar, no responsible Christian partner could solicit the organization's participation in a religious dialogue. But following Hajj Amin's death in July 1974, the Motamar began to seek forms of international recognition which were unattainable during Hajj Amin's tenure. The campaign concentrated on the United Nations, where in 1979 the Motamar finally won classification as a Category I non-governmental organization. Alongside this achievement, the Motamar undoubtedly regarded co-sponsorship of a dialogue with the WCC as another useful form of international recognition. The WCC's Dialogue Sub-Unit apparently concluded that this quest for recognition would lead the Motamar to behave responsibly and not attempt to transform the dialogue into a platform for its usual grievances.

Anti-Zionism and antisemitism

The demands of new respectability were almost too much for the Motamar to bear. Its officials not only refused to admit the distinction between religion and politics, but had difficulty in espousing an anti-Zionism free of explicit antisemitism. The Motamar's official position on Israel broached no compromise: 'Any recognition or legalization of the aggression on Palestine (whole or part) and also any conclusion of a settlement with Israel should be considered as insurgence against Islam and treason against Muslims'.³⁹ But the Motamar went still further. These Zionists 'are guided by their Protocol', and the 'Zionist scourge' 'aims at controlling the world and if not possible then it aims at annihilating the entire human race'.⁴⁰

Even as the Motamar's officials met and planned with their WCC counterparts, they decided to carry this truth to those most liable to fall under the control of the Jewish conspiracy. In the summer of 1981 and early 1982, all members of the British Parliament and the United States Senate received copies of two books, *AntiZion* (originally published as *The Jews on Trial*) and *The Six Million Reconsidered*. The two antisemitic books were written by an American neo-Nazi who had registered with the US Department of Justice as a Saudi agent in 1977. Although the literature was mailed anonymously from Karachi, it bore the Motamar's own postage meter mark.⁴¹ The Motamar, taken aback that the mailing had been traced so

39 Resolution of the Motamar's eighth conference, Famagusta, 24-8 March 1980, *Muslim World* (Karachi), 12 April 1980.

40 Motamar's declaration on al-Aqsa Day, *Muslim World*, 22 August 1981.

41 On the Motamar and the mailing incident, see *Daily Mirror* (London), 18 July 1981; *New York Times*, 22 March 1982; *New York Post*, 13 September 1982.

easily by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, denied any connection with it. And these denials, however untenable in the face of the evidence, were accepted by those who had an interest in seeing the Motamar as respectable and responsible. The WCC's Dialogue Sub-Unit passed over the incident in silence. Its partnership with the Motamar was not so cordial that the WCC could take the Motamar to task for disseminating antisemitic literature, without putting the impending dialogue at risk.

The WCC-Motamar encounter finally convened in Colombo on the last day of March 1982.⁴² Only careful planning prevented Colombo from becoming the WCC's Tripoli. The Muslim delegation, and especially Motamar President Dr Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi, launched into presentations of the political grievances of Muslims against Zionism and other neo-colonialisms. How could co-operation in any sphere be envisioned, they argued, so long as Christians extended their support to the State of Israel? For many of the Muslim participants, the Colombo dialogue was above all an opportunity to air this and other political grievances, which would have to be accommodated in the final report which the meeting planned to issue.

As it happened, a resourceful solution spared the WCC any embarrassment. The final document included a preliminary section, summarizing the emphases of both delegations. The Muslims emphasized that co-operation had to be built on 'supporting the victims of aggression and persecution', including 'unequivocal condemnation of aggression against the people of Palestine, who have been dispossessed from their homeland and are being subjected to oppression and persecution'. This did not figure as a formal point of agreement between both parties and so did not bind the WCC. But it did represent a fairly coherent statement of where future dialogue had to lead, in order for the Motamar to follow up the most important point of agreement: the establishment of a 'Joint Standing Committee' to give direction to all further dialogue.

In fact, the Motamar has hesitated to enter into such a committee, because its interest in this contact is essentially political and cannot be sustained at present without the promise of political gain. The Motamar's political frustration has been matched by the WCC's embarrassment at expressions of antisemitism in the words of the Motamar's presiding officer. In December 1984, Motamar President Dawalibi delivered a speech in Geneva to the UN Centre for Human Rights' Seminar on the Encouragement of Understanding, Tolerance and Respect in Matters Relating to Freedom of Religion and Belief, in which he provided his own Talmudic exegesis: 'The Talmud says that "if a Jew does not drink every year the blood of a non-Jewish man, then he will be damned for eternity" '. The Talmud according to Dawalibi

42 On the Colombo encounter, see *Islamochristiana*, vol. 8, 1982, 201-25; Thomas Michel, 'Report of Colombo consultation', *Bulletin*, no. 51, 1982, 204-19; *Muslim World*, 10 April 1982.

determines that 'the whole world is the property of Israel and the wealth, the blood, and the souls of non-Israelis . . . are theirs. . . . This, Mr Chairman, this belief is the reason which has caused discrimination and oppression against the Jews'.⁴³ Dawalibi's outspoken antisemitism did not damage the standing of the Motamar in the UN, but it must have caused a certain uneasiness in the WCC's Dialogue Sub-Unit. Yet despite the passage of four years since the Colombo encounter, it is still the belief in the WCC's Dialogue Sub-Unit that the relationship with the Motamar will eventually produce the desired result. Professor Diana L. Eck, Moderator of the Working Group of the Dialogue Sub-Unit, recently wrote that the 'initial meeting' at Colombo 'began to lay the foundation for future and sustained bilateral dialogue with Muslims. This will require further work in the period ahead'.⁴⁴

The Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians closely followed the WCC's attempt to draw the Motamar into dialogue, sending an observer and a message of support to Colombo. A representative of the Secretariat later visited the Motamar's Karachi headquarters, and the Secretariat ordered a background study of international Muslim organizations, which featured the Motamar and the Muslim World League.⁴⁵ In the years since Colombo, the Secretariat has also invested efforts in advising a papal campaign to improve Muslim attitudes toward Christianity. No pope has spoken of Islam and addressed himself to as many Muslim audiences as Pope John Paul II. The message of these statements has been the need of Muslims and Christians to join together in the search for peace.⁴⁶ By dispelling Muslim distrust, the Secretariat for Non-Christians hopes to ease the decision of Muslim institutions to enter into formal religious dialogue. This campaign reached a new plateau in August 1985, when the Pope addressed 80,000 Muslim youths in Casablanca, Morocco. 'No action of a Catholic pope has been so attentively observed and discussed in the Muslim world', opined an official in the Secretariat for Non-Christians, after surveying the Muslim press reactions.⁴⁷

At the same time, initial contact has been established between the Secretariat for Non-Christians and the Muslim World League in Mecca. In September 1984, the Muslim World League's new Secretary-General, Dr 'Abdallah 'Umar al-Nasif, visited Rome and was received by Pope John Paul

43 *New Republic* (Washington), 4 February 1985. At the same time, documents came to light concerning Dawalibi's activities in German-occupied Paris during the war, where he headed a pro-Axis union of Syrian students. A Nazi Party official named Dawalibi in a 1943 document as the Party's 'Arab confidence man in Paris', *New Republic*, 4 March 1985.

44 Diana L. Eck, 'A perspective on dialogue: looking ahead', *Christian Jewish Relations* (London), vol. 18, no. 4, December 1985, 69.

45 Institut Pontifical d'Etudes Arabes, *Etudes arabes dossiers* (Rome), no. 66, 1984. This is a collection of documents, preceded by a brief historical introduction.

46 For the earlier statements, see Secretariat for Non-Christians, *Chiesa e Islam* (Vatican 1981).

47 For the visit, speech and Muslim reaction, see Thomas Michel, 'Giovanni Paolo II ai giovani musulmani in Marocco', *La Civiltà Cattolica* (Rome), vol. 136, 1985, 353-62.

II. In discussions with the new head of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, Francis Cardinal Arinze, it was agreed to explore the possibilities of launching a dialogue for promoting better understanding between the two faiths.⁴⁸ No date was set, however, and while the initiative cannot yet be described as stillborn, movement toward direct dialogue has been imperceptible. The recent document known as 'The Common Bond', issued by the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, also evoked negative comment in the Muslim World League's journal, where it was construed as recognition of the Jewish right to Palestine.⁴⁹ Faced with such reactions, the Secretariat for Non-Christians has preferred to promote not an official dialogue, but papal efforts to evoke wider Muslim support for the concept of dialogue itself.

So there is a method to the present efforts of the WCC and the Holy See, even though neither has conducted a direct dialogue with any Muslim institution since 1982. They apparently await some sign of change in the climate of Muslim-Christian relations which will provide an opportunity for renewed dialogue. In the meantime, they maintain such liaisons as they have established with Muslim institutions, especially with the Motamar and the Muslim World League, and rely upon papal pronouncements and travels to evoke favourable comment in the Muslim world. When an improvement in the broader climate of dialogue does occur, the Dialogue Sub-Unit and the Secretariat for Non-Christians believe that the Motamar and the Muslim World League will be the first to sense it. The Colombo resolution on the 'Joint Standing Committee' will then be given new life.

The next steps

The Christian partners to the Muslim-Christian dialogue now generally realize that their own highest expectations from the dialogue cannot be met unless the prospective Muslim partners either moderate their views on Jewry and Israel, or leave those issues to some future dialogue between Muslims and Jews. But it seems likely that when direct Muslim-Christian dialogue is resumed, Israel will again figure in the deliberations. The Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians and the WCC's Dialogue Sub-Unit have learned by trial and error how to handle these issues in joint statements and final communiqués. But they cannot influence the intrusive ways in which these issues are raised by their Muslim partners.

The partnership with the Motamar therefore poses a serious problem. The Muslim organization is still led by an old guard imbued with plainly antisemitic convictions, learned under the lengthy tutorship of the late Hajj Amin al-Husayni. They seem incapable of freeing themselves from the

48 *Saudi Gazette* (Jidda), 12 October 1984.

49 *Akhbar al-'Alam al-Islami* (Mecca), 15 July 1985.

offensive notions which have guided them these past forty years. One possible influence for change might be the tone set in Pakistan itself by President Zia ul-Haq, to whom the Motamar must show deference. President Zia's March 1986 urging of the PLO to accept UN Security Council Resolution 242 came in the context of Pakistan's close relationships with Jordan and Saudi Arabia. 'You cannot say Israel doesn't exist', opined President Zia. 'You have to face realities'. If the Motamar could be made to endorse this view, it might emerge as a worthy partner for dialogue with the WCC and the Vatican, and perhaps a partner for 'trialogue' in the more distant future. But there are many countervailing influences, such as the Motamar's past habits, the demands of the Muslim World League in Mecca and fundamentalist extremism in Pakistan.

For this reason, the progress of Muslim-Christian dialogue should be closely attended by those same Jewish organizations involved in high-level dialogue with the WCC and the Vatican. It is not too early for the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations to build up some expertise on contemporary Islam, Muslim institutions and Muslim interlocutors. Contact should also be maintained with those who deal with Muslim affairs on behalf of the WCC and the Vatican. It is significant that the Twelfth Meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, convened in Rome in October 1985, was attended by the best-informed and most active specialist on Islam in the Secretariat for Non-Christians, Father Thomas Michel SJ. He attended the Colombo dialogue as an observer and visited the Motamar's headquarters in February 1985. Consideration might be given to similar participation by Jewish experts on contemporary Islam, of whom there are several in Israel and the Diaspora. As Christians and Jews seek new ways to carry their dialogue past its present limits, they might well ponder together the promise and problems of approaching Islam.

Martin Kramer

This analysis is published as part of an IJA series of

RESEARCH REPORTS

Responding to events as they happen and assessing their significance for world Jewry, *IJA Research Reports* are invaluable aids to community leaders, politicians, rabbis, academics and concerned individuals. Twenty of these analyses of highly topical, social, political, economic and legal issues, background surveys and intelligence documents appear each year (annual subscription: £25.00/\$90.00 USA and Canada by direct airmail; includes attractive binder for storage).

Other periodicals published by the IJA are:

SOVIET JEWISH AFFAIRS

A journal on Jewish problems in the USSR and Eastern Europe. Includes historical and broad contextual aspects as well as current developments and analyses. Articles, reviews, documentation and bibliography. Three times yearly: February, May and November (annual subscription: individuals—£12.00/\$20.00 USA and Canada; institutions—£16.00/\$25.00 USA and Canada).

PATTERNS OF PREJUDICE

A journal devoted to the study of causes and manifestations of racial, religious and ethnic discrimination and prejudice, with particular reference to antisemitism. Articles, reviews, legal developments, bibliography. Quarterly: January, April, July and October (annual subscription: individuals—£12.00/\$20.00 USA and Canada; institutions—£16.00/\$25.00 USA and Canada).

CHRISTIAN JEWISH RELATIONS

A review of the more important statements and publications relevant to the Churches' new approach. Quarterly: March, June, September and December (annual subscription: individuals—£21.00/\$20.00 USA and Canada; institutions—£16.00/\$25.00 USA and Canada).

Special inclusive subscription rates (UK, Europe and overseas by surface mail; USA and Canada by bulk airmail):

All three journals	£29.00 (\$48.00)
Three journals plus Research Reports	£42.00 (\$105.00)

Available from the INSTITUTE OF JEWISH AFFAIRS, 11 Hertford Street,
London W1Y 7DX (Tel: 01-491 3517), or its New York office:
Suite 418, 1 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10016

IJA Research Reports 1986

No. 1	The Budapest Cultural Forum of the Helsinki Process, October-November 1985	STEPHEN J. ROTH
Nos. 2 & 3	Latin America and the Palestinian question	IGNACIO KLICH
No. 4	Israel in the mind of American Jews: public opinion trends and analysis	EYTAN GILBOA
No. 5	Arms transfers and the future of the Arab-Israeli conflict	KEITH KRAUSE
No. 6	The French elections of 16 March 1986	NELLY HANSSON
No. 7	The impact of the United Nations Decade for Women. Diversity and politics in the women's movement	AVRIEL BUTOVSKY
No. 8	Terrorism against Jewish and Israeli targets in Europe 1980-85. A presentation of data	MICHAEL MAY
No. 9	The Berne CSCE Conference on Human Contacts. No progress for Soviet Jewry at the 'Helsinki process' meeting	STEPHEN J. ROTH
No. 10	South African Jewry today	HARRY SCHWARZ
Nos. 11 & 12	Israel in the Muslim-Christian dialogue	MARTIN KRAMER

Single copies are available from the Institute of Jewish Affairs. Special reduced rates for bulk orders.

IJA Research Reports are indexed in *Index of Articles on Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem), *Kiryat Sefer* (Jerusalem) and in *Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory* (New York) and are listed online by Bowker International Serials Database (New York).

Subscription: £25/\$90 (per annum); single copy: £1.00/\$2.00.

ISSN 0257-6406

Printed by Martins Printing Group